

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A collaborative computing method comprising the steps of:
 - providing a collaborative computing system comprising at least one instant messaging client;
 - initializing said instant message client within a graphical user interface of said collaborative computing system;
 - receiving a search initializing action from said graphical user interface;
 - responsive to said receiving step, presenting search input fields within said graphical user interface;
 - receiving input via said input fields that specifies a search pattern;
 - searching at least one record source for online entities that satisfy said search pattern; and
 - displaying a search result from said searching step within said graphical user interface.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein said collaborative computing system is a Lotus Sametime (TM) type system.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein said search initializing action comprises at most two user inputs.
4. The method of claim 3, further comprising the step of:
 - displaying a menu option within said graphical user interface for said instant message client, wherein said menu option is configured to initiate said search view.
5. The method of claim 3, further comprising the step of:
 - providing a keyboard combination to initiate said search view, whereby said keyboard combination is a hot-key combination.

6. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:
establishing a plurality of user specific search patterns; and
recording said search patterns so that said search patterns can be retrieved at a later time.
7. The method of claim 1, wherein said record source comprises a first database that is a record source specifying at least one online entity and a second database having a data field, wherein said data field specifies an attribute relating to said online entity that is not specified within said first database, said searching step further comprising the steps of:
establishing a query that includes said data field; and
searching for at least one online entity using said query.
8. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:
specifying a plurality of record sources, each of which specifies at least one online entity, wherein said searching step further comprises searching said plurality of record sources for online entities that satisfy said search pattern.
9. The method of claim 8, further comprising the steps of:
establishing at least one search preference that is used when performing said searching step, wherein said search result is based at least in part upon said search preference.
10. The method of claim 8, further comprising the step of:
establishing an order in which said record sources are accessed during said searching step.
11. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:
directly executing at least one software-enhanced communication involving said online entity and a user of said graphical user interface using said search result.

12. A method for establishing software-enhanced communications comprising the steps of:

- receiving a user specified search pattern;
- searching a point of presence database for online entities having access to a collaboration software application which satisfy said search pattern;
- presenting a list of said resulting online entities;
- receiving a selection of at least one of said resulting online entities contained within said list; and
- establishing a software-enhanced communication session between said user and said selected online entity.

13. The method of claim 12, further comprising the step of:

- displaying a graphical user interface for an instant messaging component of said collaboration software application, wherein said graphical user interface provides a user selectable search option;
- receiving a user selection for said search option; and
- responsively presenting search input fields within said graphical user interface, wherein said search pattern is based upon data input into said search input fields.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein said software-enhanced communication session includes a type of communication other than instant messaging.

15. The method of claim 12, wherein said collaboration software application is a Lotus Sametime (TM) type application.

16. A collaboration software system comprising:

- a collaboration server configured to coordinate collaboration operations between a plurality of geographically disperse software components; and
- at least one client side collaboration application that includes a search engine, said search engine configured to query said collaboration software system for online

entities, wherein said client side collaboration application contains a graphical user interface permitting user customization of said search engine.

17. The system of claim 16, wherein said graphical user interface comprises an instant messenger view and a search view.

18. The system of claim 17, wherein said search view is directly initiated from said instant messenger view, and wherein said search view utilizes said search engine.

19. A machine-readable storage having stored thereon, a computer program having a plurality of code sections, said code sections executable by a machine for causing the machine to perform the steps of:

- providing a collaborative computing system comprising at least one instant messaging client;

- initializing said instant message client within a graphical user interface of said collaborative computing system;

- receiving a search initializing action from said graphical user interface;

- responsive to said receiving step, presenting search input fields within said graphical user interface;

- receiving input via said input fields that specifies a search pattern;

- searching at least one record source for online entities that satisfy said search pattern; and

- displaying a search result from said searching step within said graphical user interface.

20. The machine-readable storage of claim 19, wherein said collaborative computing system is a Lotus Sametime (TM) type system.

21. The machine-readable storage of claim 19, wherein said search initializing action comprises at most two user inputs.

22. The machine-readable storage of claim 21, further comprising the step of:
displaying a menu option within said graphical user interface for said instant message client, wherein said menu option is configured to initiate said search view.
23. The machine-readable storage of claim 21, further comprising the step of:
providing a keyboard combination to initiate said search view, whereby said keyboard combination is a hot-key combination.
24. The machine-readable storage of claim 19, further comprising the steps of:
establishing a plurality of user specific search patterns; and
recording said search patterns so that said search patterns can be retrieved at a later time.
25. The machine-readable storage of claim 19, wherein said record source comprises a first database that is a record source specifying at least one online entity and a second database having a data field, wherein said data field specifies an attribute relating to said online entity that is not specified within said first database, said searching step further comprising the steps of:
establishing a query that includes said data field; and
searching for at least one online entity using said query.
26. The machine-readable storage of claim 19, further comprising the steps of:
specifying a plurality of record sources, each of which specifies at least one online entity, wherein said searching step further comprises searching said plurality of record sources for online entities that satisfy said search pattern.
27. The machine-readable storage of claim 26, further comprising the step of:
establishing at least one search preference that is used when performing said searching step, wherein said search result is based at least in part upon said search preference.

28. The machine-readable storage of claim 26, further comprising the step of:
establishing an order in which said record sources are accessed during said searching step.
29. The machine-readable storage of claim 19, further comprising the step of:
directly executing at least one software-enhanced communication involving said online entity and a user of said graphical user interface using said search result.
30. A machine-readable storage having stored thereon, a computer program having a plurality of code sections, said code sections executable by a machine for causing the machine to perform the steps of:
receiving a user specified search pattern;
searching a point of presence database for online entities having access to a collaboration software application which satisfy said search pattern;
presenting a list of said resulting online entities;
receiving a selection of at least one of said online entities contained within said list; and
establishing a software-enhanced communication session between said user and said selected online entity.
31. The machine-readable storage of claim 30, further comprising the step of:
displaying a graphical user interface for an instant messaging component of said collaboration software application, wherein said graphical user interface provides a user selectable search option;
receiving a user selection for said search option; and
responsively presenting search input fields within said graphical user interface, wherein said search pattern is based upon data input into said search input fields.
32. The machine-readable storage of claim 31, wherein said software-enhanced communication session includes a type of communication other than instant messaging.

33. The machine-readable storage of claim 30, wherein said collaboration software application is a Lotus Sametime (TM) type application.

34. A collaborative computing system comprising:

an instant messaging client;

a graphical user interface configured to grant authorized users access to said instant messaging client, wherein said graphical user interface is further configured to permit said authorized users to conduct a user specific search for online entities; and

means for establishing a software-enhanced communication session between said authorized user and said online entities that result from said user specific search.

35. A system for establishing software-enhanced communications comprising:

means for receiving a user specified search pattern;

means for searching a point of presence database for online entities having access to a collaboration software application which satisfy said search pattern;

means for presenting a list of said resulting online entities;

means for receiving a selection of at least one of said online entities contained within said list; and

means for establishing a software-enhanced communication session between said user and said selected online entity.